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ABSTRACT

In 1965, transcripts were collected of 72 sermons on the issue of racial integration preached between 1955 and 1965. The sermons, all given by Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or Episcopal ministers in the southern United States, were examined to determine the position advocated by the minister. The sermons deemed segregationist were then analyzed for recurring strategies used to defend the segregation viewpoint. The major arguments of the segregationists may be summarized as follows: (1) segregation is the divine will of God as expressed in the Bible; (2) desegregation leads to mixed marriages, which are undesirable; (3) segregation is a universal law of nature; (4) integration is supported by the Communist party; (5) the motives of those who support integration are improper; (6) segregation does not necessarily entail discrimination; (7) segregation is desired by blacks; (8) a democracy allows the free choice of personal associates; and (9) segregation is supported by many great and famous people. The collected segregationist sermons are not, however, representative of the bulk of southern preaching during that ten-year period. Many southern ministers were silent on racial issues, while others felt that general lessons of fellowship and love of neighbor were sufficient. Some were, no doubt, afraid to preach on the subject, but a surprising number of the collected sermons openly advocated integration. (HTH)

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From the time Rosa Parks a black domestic worker in Montgomery, Alabama refused to give her seat to a white patron, until the passage of the Civil Rights Law in 1965, the arguments for and against racial segregation were unleashed. One group of speakers whose notions received the largest audience was the southern, white, protestant ministers. Sermons of those ministers favoring segregation, the apparent loser in this battle, provide an interesting study in how a group of persons with their backs against the wall defend their position.

As Braden points out, much of the opposition to racial integration was beyond the realm of traditional rhetorical strategy. Racist songs, economic reprisals, terror, and intimidation typify this kind of "extrinsic" rhetoric used to oppose integration. The official intrinsic rhetoric of the politicians, ministers, editors and other community leaders as seen through the accounts of their public statements demonstrate a reoccurring series strategies. In the state of Mississippi, for example, Braden isolated six such strategies.¹

In 1965 an attempt was made to collect manuscripts of as many sermons by southern ministers as possible in which they addressed themselves to racial issues.² Seventy-two sermons preached between 1955 and 1965 were collected. All of the sermons were preached in the Southern States region by ministers who were affiliated with either Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or Episcopal churches. These sermons were then analyzed in order to determine the position advocated by each minister. Sermons which defended the segregated status-quo were then closely examined to determine the reoccurring strategies.

The most frequent idea expressed by the segregationists was that the principle of segregation is supported by the Bible. This idea took two forms. Some of the segregationists seemed to think that separation of the races was permitted by the Bible.³ A more extreme view was that the Bible demanded segregation.⁴ The position that the Bible demands segregation is an apparent attempt by segregationists to make separation of the races binding on a "Christian society." Dr. Claude V. Broach of Charlotte, North Carolina, who supports the theory that the Bible "allows" segregation expressed this view in the following words:

While the Bible contains no clear mandate for or against segregation as between the white and negro races... concerning matters of this kind, which in the inscrutable wisdom of God have been left for mankind to work out in the light of reason and experience without the full light of revelation, we dare not be dogmatic.⁵

In contrast, Reverend Cary Daniel, A Baptist pastor in Dallas, indicates that segregation is demanded by the Scriptures when he says:

Let us not be lulled into a stupor by sweet talk, and let us not be too naive to admit that what is called "integration" is nothing more nor less than the organized attack of the forces of Hell upon God's will.⁶

To use the Bible as "proof" for their position that segregation is either optional or mandatory (whether their exegesis of the passages was correct or not), shows insight into the mind of the audience. The widespread Southern feeling that the Bible is the ultimate authority in matters of religion and morals demanded that the segregationist give "chapter and verse" for his position. This unwavering Southern faith in the Bible is pointed out in the words of a Southern Baptist in a sermon entitled "The Bible":

The Bible is the source of all good. It is the forerunner of civilization. It brings to man the blessing of

home, the protection of property, the security of life and liberty, reveals to him his origin, tells him his mission and points him to his destiny.

The Holy Bible is the rule by which the human race must live.

Another idea that was expressed by the segregationists was that the integration of races lends inevitably to "mixed marriages" (Marriages between persons of different races), and that these marriages were undesirable or unscriptural. Gillespie stated the inevitability of mixed marriages briefly as he discussed what he called the real issue." He said:

Many well-meaning civil and religious leaders who denounce the principle of segregation, and endorse the policy of integration in schools, churches, and other areas of life, seem to ignore, or deliberately refuse to recognize that the question of racial amalgamation is inevitably involved, and in the nature of the case is bound to overshadow all other areas of the problem.⁸

The supposed relation between integration and mixed marriages was also pointed out by Reverend James P. Dees of Trinity Episcopal Church in Statesville, North Carolina. He reiterated what Gillespie had said in these words:

I believe that the current proponents of integration are advocates of total integration, not just integration of the schools and churches; these are just the first steps. They would integrate the two races completely; I do not think there is any question of this.

And total integration will result in racial amalgamation will bring with it a consequent disintegration of both races - both white and Negro - and the South of the future would consist of one mixed race and a mulatto culture.⁹

After establishing the inevitability of mixed marriages, integrationists next typically argued that they were inherently bad. Reverend George W. Cheek accomplished this by drawing a repugnant picture of the Negro:

The burning desire for this type of mixing (mixed marriages) flatly and forever refused, arouses in some of the uncouth members of that race a kind of brutish vengeful spirit which stems back into his native Africa where a big, flat, slick human being would have no more chance of

living than a fat shoate has on the farm the coldest day of winter.¹⁰

A similar idea which was frequently presented stressed the fact that "segregation" was a universal law. In expressing this idea the ministers make the dubious assumption that what is true in the "animal kingdom" ought also to be true in human relations. Reverend Cheek expressed this when he said:

In the world, the God of nature seems to have ordained a segregated life. In all my years, of more than three score years and ten, from childhood I have observed closely nature's bird family: The black, the red, the blue, and the jay bird. I discover no change in the color of even one feather, or one inherent characteristic. I note also that they have no communication with one another, and when contacts are too close, there is a fight.¹¹

Continuing the same line of reasoning, a Presbyterian in Mississippi put the argument of "universal law" into these words:

The old adage, "Birds of a feather flock together," only expresses a fact of common observation and universal experience. There are many varieties of the bird family, but under natural conditions, so far as known, bluebirds never mate with redbirds, doves never mate with blackbirds, nor mockingbirds with jays. The fact that man is a gregarious animal and that human beings everywhere and under all conditions of life tend to segregate themselves into families, tribes, national or racial groups, only goes to prove that all human relations are regulated by this universal law of nature.¹²

The "universality" of these laws of segregation, it was implied, only reinforced in nature the things which God has ordained in the written word.

The idea that integration of the races is supported by the Communists, and that persons who support integration are Communists was often affirmed or implied. The users of this idea were, of course, evading the real issues. This idea was approached from two directions. First, the principle of integration was associated with the Communist movement. This was expressed by Reverend Dees to a local civic group in these words:

I believe that the Communist Party's program as outlined above is behind the entire integration movement, whether the people in the various walks of life who are working for integration recognize it or not...they are being duped into doing the will of the Communists.¹³

The second method of asserting this idea was to associate the various groups and their leaders with the Communist. The groups which were most often attacked were the NAACP and the National Council of Churches. Ebenezer Meyer, a North Carolina Methodist, used these words to connect the National Council of Churches to Communism:

The National Council has been soft toward (sic) Communism, advocating peaceful coexistence; against American preparation for defense; while Russia and China go all out to destroy us.¹⁴

One minister dealt with the so-called "communist influence" in these words:

We are combating the racial propaganda of the Communist Party in the National and State Council of Churches, many Christian denominations, the integration minded preachers (and they are legion), the NAACP, the money of many of the large foundations, the liberal press, and the liberal elements of the political parties...¹⁵

This idea seems to have been well chosen even though it was evasive. The idea added an emotional complication to the already difficult racial issue. It implied that all integrationists were duped by the communist "conspiracy." By so doing, it rationalized the continued practice of segregation.

The idea that the persons trying to enforce integration were merely seeking popularity and fame was also presented by the segregationists. In connection with this, it was often stated that people who advocated de-segregated worship services were insincere. Although the accusation may have been true in many cases, it seems to have been an ad hominem argument. To attack the principle of "integration" on the basis of the motives of its supporters was unwarranted. Dr. J. D. Grey used these three sentences

to point out this weakness of integrationists as he spoke to the congregation of the First Baptist Church in New Orleans:

First of all it (activities of churches working toward integration) is wrong because it capitalizes on controversy...Moreover, I say, its impulse appears to be purely exhibition and display...I say also its motivation is insincere.¹⁶

This idea was expressed in connection with Biblical denunciations of persons who acted out of false motives. For example, the following statements were taken from the Bible to describe the integrationists:

Wherefore the Lord said, For as much as this people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.¹⁷

And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after covetousness.¹⁸

Another idea used by the segregationists was that segregation does not necessitate discrimination. The relationship between segregation and discrimination is perplexing. That segregation is discrimination has already been asserted by the courts.¹⁹ This idea, while alluded to many times, lacked adequate treatment by the segregationists. Ministers opposing integration simply charged that just because people practice segregation, this does not mean that they practice discrimination. This seems to be one area in which Christian ethics could be used to the advantage of the segregationists. The asserters of this idea conceded that discrimination often accompanied segregation, but insisted that discrimination was not inherent in the segregated society. This idea was best expressed in Gillespie's sermon to the Synod of Mississippi.

Whenever two individuals or groups of widely different physical characteristics are brought into close contact, it is likely or even inevitable that some

discrimination should occur especially where the situations are competitive but such discrimination is a spontaneous human reaction and cannot be charged against the principle of segregation.²⁰

The segregationists also often argued that segregation is beneficial to, and desired by the Negro. This idea, if it could have been supported amply, could have had considerable force. However, it contained basic supportive weaknesses. Sometimes this idea was accompanied by the idea that the Negro can best express his racial pride in a segregated society. Reverend Dees has expressed this idea as he stated his convictions in these words:

I am a segregationist because I believe that segregation serves the best interests of both White and Negro races in the South. There is no question in my mind about this.²¹

A Baptist in Texas said:

I am advised by reliable Negro leaders that the Negroes themselves to a great extent, do not want integration.²²

This idea lacked adequate definition. Particularly, in what respect is segregation better for the Negro? Segregationists did not elaborate on their claim; they just asserted it.

The idea was expressed by the segregationists that the principle of segregation was merely an extension of the democratic system of government. This idea, it seems, stems from a misinterpretation of the integrationists' point of view. The segregationists interpret the goal of the integrationists to be one of forcing Negroes upon whites as marriage partners and companions. This view was expressed by Dr. W. A. Crisswell, pastor of The First Baptist Church of Dallas, largest church in the Southern Baptist Convention, in these words:

Now in saying these things we have malice toward none. We don't look down on any race or any creed or any church or any people, nor are we setting ourselves apart as being any

better than anybody else. It is just this - that one of the glories of a democratic society, we can choose our own friends; we can choose our companions; we can choose the mates that share with us the building of our homes. We can choose our lives. It's a free country. It's a free nation and that thing of... They don't like the word but call it that - that thing enters all of the realms of our lives, and there is no escaping from it if a man has liberty of choice.²³

Another idea often presented was that segregation is supported by many great men. For this idea they had considerable support. Many times rather than saying "many great men support segregation" they named specific people who supported separation of the races. For example, D. B. Red said:

David Livingston practiced segregation and wrote in favor of it. Albert Schweitzer was practicing segregation in his hospital as late as 1955. Who will presume to love God and the black man better than these immortals?²⁴

Gillespie has added this comment:

Ample evidence is available to show beyond reasonable doubt that segregation represents the best thinking of representative American leadership, and as a time tested national policy rests upon moral and ethical principles and not upon blind and unreasoning prejudice, as has been frequently and loudly charged by some of its latter day critics.²⁵

The segregationists spent very little time in refutation of the ideas of the integrationists. When they did use refutation it consisted primarily of quotations and allusions to the Bible. Perhaps they did not use refutation much because they considered themselves to be advocates of the status quo. Any lengthy defensive refutation would have placed them on the defense. They chose rather to put the major burden on the integrationists.

The major ideas of the segregationists may be summarized as follows:

- (1) Segregation is the divine will of God as expressed in the Bible.
- (2) Desegregation leads to mixed marriages which are undesirable. (3) Segre-

gation is a universal law of nature. (4) Integration is supported by the Communist party. (5) Those who support integration are merely exhibitionists and their motives are improper. (6) Segregation is not necessarily racial discrimination. (7) Segregation is best for, and desired by the Negroes. (8) A democracy allows the free choice of personal associates. (9) Segregation is supported by the many great men and famous people. It was also noted that the segregationists spent little time in refuting the arguments of the integrationists.

Concluding Observations

The nine reoccurring ideas discovered in the segregationist sermons reflect remarkable similarity to those six strategies noted by Braden in the "Closed Society" of Mississippi segregationist spokesmen. The strategies of sanctification and legitimization of the segregationists faith is obviously parallel. In addition, the paranoia expressions about an outside plot by sinister integration forces are almost identical. It would seem, from these observations, that the segregationists in southern pulpits were not much different in their thinking than were the civic leaders in their communities.

It must be stated that the segregationist sermons presented in this paper are not representative of the bulk of the preaching in southern protestant churches during the 1955 - 1965 period. A great many southern ministers were silent on the racial issue, feeling that such sermonizing was inappropriate. Others felt that general lessons of fellowship, love of neighbors, etc. were adequate treatment of the subject. Some no doubt were afraid to preach on the subject, but a suprising number of the sermons collected during the period openly advocated integration of public schools, churches, and public areas.²⁷

FOOTNOTES

¹Waldo W. Braden, "The Rhetoric of a Closed Society," Southern Speech Communication Journal XLV (Summer 1980), p. 339-340.

"The spokesman for the Establishment directed their efforts toward promoting, maintaining, and tightening their control with at least six strategies. First, they gave major attention to continued sanctification of the faith: white supremacy. Second, they attempted to legitimize their resistance. Third, they exerted much effort to maintaining a positive and unyielding stance. Fourth, they put on a stout defense of the good character of Mississippians. Fifth, they rationalized that they were victims of an outside plot. Sixth, they emphasized that success depended upon maintaining unity.

²Almost all the sermons were obtained through personal correspondence. The author wrote the heads of the various religious groups and requested sermons and addresses of persons who might be able to provide relevant materials. A few of the sermons were available in published works, and on micro film. Others were obtained through personal interview.

³G. T. Gillespie, "A Christian View on Segregation," Sermon preached before the Synod of Mississippi of the Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi, November 4, 1956.

⁴T. Robert Ingram, "Why Integration is Un-Christian," Sermon delivered to the Citizens Council in Jackson, Mississippi, May 17, 1963.

⁵Claude V. Broach, "The Christian Conscience and Segregation," Sermon preached to the First Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, May, 1957, p. 3.

⁶Cary Daniel, "God, the Original Segregationist," Sermon preached to the First Baptist Church of West Dallas, Texas, September, 1957, p. 2.

⁷H. A. Dixon, Saving Faith and Other Sermons (Nashville, Tennessee: Gospel Advocate Company), p. 27.

⁸Frank Stagg, "The Bible," Sermon preached to the First Baptist Church in Eustis, Florida.

⁹G. T. Gillespie, p. 3.

¹⁰James P. Dees, "A Survey of the Racial Issue," Address delivered to a local civic body of Statsville, North Carolina, some time after 1958.

¹¹George W. Cheek, "The Pending Tragedy of the South," Sermon preached to St. James Methodist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, after November, 1957.

¹²Cheek, p. 4.

¹³Gillespie, p. 3.

¹⁴Dees, p. 1.

¹⁵Ebenezer Myers, "Segregation and the National Council of Churches," Sermon preached in Lenoir, North Carolina, after September, 1960, p. 5.

¹⁶Dees, p. 5.

¹⁷J. D. Gary "The Kneel-In Brigade," Sermon preached to the First Baptist Church in New Orleans, Louisiana, September 18, 1960, p. 5.

¹⁸Isiah 29:13.

¹⁹Ezekiel 33:31.

²⁰That segregation is de facto discrimination was implied when the Supreme Court declared the principle of "separate but equal" unconstitutional.

²¹Gillespie, p. 4.

²²Dees, p. 1.

²³Daniel, p. 4.

²⁴W. A. Criswell, "Christianity and Segregation," Address to the Joint Association of the Sovereign State of South Carolina, January, 1956.

²⁵B. D. Red, "A Corrupt Tree Bringeth Forth Evil Fruit," Sermon preached to the Baptist Church in Hattisburg, Mississippi, after September, 1957, p. 1.

²⁶Gillespie, p. 5.

²⁷Jerry Butler, An Analysis of the Ideas and Support Used in the Speeches of Southern White Protestant Ministers on Racial Issues Since December 1, 1955. A Masters Thesis: Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Illinois, 1965.